

Overview of California Early Start



What is Early Start?

Early Start is California's system of early intervention services provided to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. It is a multiagency effort by the Department of Developmental Services and the California Department of Education that encourages partnerships between families and professionals, family support, and coordination of services. The statewide system of early intervention services is available throughout California and can be accessed through regional centers for developmental disabilities, county offices of education, local school districts, health or social service agencies, and family resource centers/networks in your community.

An important part of Early Start is the network of family resource centers and networks (FRC/Ns) that provide parent-to-parent contact, information about disabilities and early intervention, and assistance in accessing services. Phone contact, home or hospital visits, and support groups are all ways in which families might connect with experienced, knowledgeable parent "peers" through their local FRC/N.

Who is eligible?

Infants and toddlers from birth to 36 months of age may be eligible for early intervention services, if through documented evaluation and assessment, they meet one of the criteria listed below:

1. have a developmental delay in either cognitive, communication, social or emotional, adaptive, or physical and motor development including vision and hearing; or
2. have established risk conditions of known etiology with a high probability of resulting in delayed development; or
3. are at high risk of having a substantial developmental disability due to a combination of risk factors.



What are early intervention services?

Early intervention services are provided based on the developmental needs of the child, the concerns and priorities of the family, and the resources available to them. Services are provided within the context of the child and family's daily activities and routines. Eligible children and families may receive a variety of early intervention services; some children may need only one or two early intervention services. Early intervention services may include:



- assistive technology, including devices or services
- audiology or hearing services
- family training, counseling, and home visits
- health services necessary for a child to benefit from other early intervention services
- medical services for diagnosis and evaluation only
- nursing services
- nutrition services
- occupational therapy
- physical therapy
- psychological services
- respite services
- service coordination (case management)
- social work services
- special instruction
- speech and language services
- transportation and related costs necessary for a child to receive services
- vision services

Who provides services and supports?

Early intervention services are individually determined for each eligible infant or toddler and are provided, purchased, or arranged by a regional center or local education agency. Local education agencies are primarily responsible for services for infants with vision, hearing, and severe orthopedic impairments, including any combination of these solely low incidence disabilities. Regional centers are responsible for services for all other children eligible for Early Start. Family resource centers and networks provide parent-to-parent support, information, and referral for all families.





How much does it cost?

Early Start services are provided at no cost to families. Early Start is funded by federal and state funds. Other publicly-funded services may also be used. Private insurance is another resource that may be used to fund an early intervention service if the family will not incur a financial cost or loss of coverage of benefits. Use of private insurance is voluntary and requires the family's informed consent.

Are other services available?

Yes. The Departments of Health Services, Mental Health, Social Services, and Alcohol and Drug Programs are State agencies that provide services and resources that may be of benefit. Descriptions of the services that these agencies provide are contained in this directory. Each agency determines eligibility for the services that it provides.

I need more information.

Who do I call?

Call the regional center in your local area or 800/515-BABY for resource information or referral to local Early Start services and family resource centers and networks. Call 800/869-4337 for product information and free multilingual resources on early intervention.



What is the process for making a referral?

